

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

I. Brief Overview of Laboratory

The Interim Evaluation of the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) took place during May 17 – 21, 1999 at the REL's headquarters in Honolulu, Hawaii. The PREL has been in operation since 1983 as the 10th funded Lab, but was under the direction/supervision of the Northwest Regional Educational Lab (NWREL) from 1985 – 1990. Since 1990 the PREL has functioned as an independent, non-profit 501 (c) 3 corporation that serves the Pacific educational community. Specifically, the Lab serves: American Samoa; Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; Federated States of Micronesia: Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap; Guam; Hawaii; Republic of the Marshall Island; and the Republic of Palau. In the region served by the REL there are 30 indigenous languages spoken. According to the Lab's staff, approximately 2/3 of the REL's constituency resides in the state of Hawaii.

The region served by the REL covers approximately 4.9 million square miles, covers six time zones, including the International dateline, and is represented by 11 major Pacific cultures. The size and diversity of the region served by the REL impact the way in which the Lab operates to meet its contractual and ideological functions.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the REL doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

Leadership for the REL is provided by a President and CEO, Dr. John Kofel, who has served in that capacity since the beginning operations of the REL; Dr. Tom Barlow, Chief

Program Officer; Dr. Juvenna Chang, Director of the REL; a Board of Directors of twenty members, ten of whom are the CEOs of their respective entities' DOE, with the other ten representing constituents from the broader educational community, including teachers, administrators, DOE staff, and the business community, in addition to advisory boards, e.g., the Research Advisory Council the Program Planning Council. The governing board meets three to four times a year.

The governance structure for the REL appears to be appropriate and adequately staffed to carry out their contractual obligations. To improve service and communication to the ten entities served by the REL, service centers have been established on 8 of the 10 entities, with Kosrae and Palau being the only entities served by the REL without a service center.

1. Strengths

From interviews with board members (Malau Peter, Damian Sol, Mike McCartney, and Lynne Waihee, a former first lady) and various clients/customers, it is quite clear that the REL's president and CEO, Dr. John Kofel is held in very high esteem both within the REL, but more importantly within the educational community throughout the region. According to one board member, "John is the key to keeping the board together and regionally focused", another board member commented that, "They [entities] treat John like a head of state."

There appears to be a good flow of communication between the various projects and the board members who approve the REL's direction and commitment of resources. No board member interviewed felt as if they were not provided sufficient and timely information prior to board meetings or at other times of needed decision making.

The staff for the various projects appears to be adequately to excellently prepared by training and experience to carry out the functions necessary to serve the region and provide

appropriate leadership to the region. This is particularly true for the Signature 1 project, “Research and Development Cadre/Research Studies”, as evidenced by the progress made in the research projects, RAPSTA and PLUS.

Currently, the facilities and equipment used by the REL could only be classified as absolutely first rate. The equipment and facilities utilized by the REL allow the Lab’s staff to maximize both their efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling the REL contractual obligations.

The focus of the REL, from the CEO to Board members to project directors, appears always to be on what are the needs of the various entities in the region. Given the size and complexity of the region served by the REL, this is no easy task; but one which they appear to both appreciate and continue to strive to accomplish. In setting priorities for the expenditure of funds, the general approach appears to be one of a democratic process of voting among the representative of the various entities. At this point, it appears that this process is acceptable and is working.

The REL appears to have a very positive reputation throughout the region, particularly with the “DOEs” of the ten island constituencies. Such comments as the following were commonly expressed during this site visit, “They [REL] are instrumental in responding to the needed technical assistance in the region, and PREL is more visible than ‘research universities’ in the region.”, “ The PREL staff is very energetic and very responsive to our people.”, “PREL’s programs and conferences gives our teachers something to look forward to each year.”, “Within the region, it [REL] is an influential force in the region.”, “PREL is about hope in the region, as the region struggles for identity.”, and “PREL has developed a formal and informal communication network in the region that did not exist before, and thus, they have become an integral part of the educational community.”

The REL appears to have established several levels of networks and strategic alliances with appropriate constituent groups; these include DOE's, schools, and other RELs, particularly the other two with the same specialty area of Language and Cultural diversity.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None at this time

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

B. To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

Given the relative “newness” of this REL, the “products” emerging from this REL have been relatively few. In the years of the Lab’s first funding cycle and into the initial years of the current funding cycle, the REL appears to have focused on establishing the necessary levels of trust and confidence among the various constituent groups within the entities served within this Pacific region. Thus, their main focus has been on capacity building, and they appear to have been very successful in this endeavor.

The “products” that have been developed during this current period of time have been primarily in the form of reading and other literature related materials, audio and video tapes, and “tests” developed and adapted to each entity and language(s) within these entities.

The REL appears to have relied primarily on surveys and personal interactions with constituent groups to provide the feedback for their products and services. Survey returns have tended to be minimal and in some cases the usefulness of such information has been questionable, e.g., the validity of some of the initial RAPSTA study data.

1. Strengths

This REL is customer focused and has established an excellent record of capacity building in the region.

The REL has established a level of trust and confidence among its various constituent groups that now allows for the development of products and services in partnership that can be uniquely adapted to the cultures and languages within and among the ten entities served by this REL.

The REL has clearly adapted activities in response to feedback from its customers/clients that are unquestionably focused on the needs and issues within the region.

2. Areas of needed improvement

The REL needs to establish a more formalized system of both internal and external evaluation of its programs, services, and products.

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

III. Quality

To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?

With the growth of the REL over the past several years, the REL has been able to attract and hire high quality professionals who bring the necessary levels of expertise and knowledge base to help in the process of developing high quality products and services. This said, it is important to note that one of the positive characteristics of this REL is its insistence on the collaboration of its clients/customers in the development of any product or the organization and delivery of any service. Therefore, the development of products and services benefit from both the knowledge and expertise of the professional staff combined with the direct collaboration of

the target audiences.

1. Strengths

The REL's products and services are consistent with the stated mission of the organization.

The REL is seen as a primary source for constituent groups and individuals within the region for providing information on educational issues, products, and services that may be provided by the REL, or other agencies/institutions.

The REL is definitely "field based" in the development and delivery of products and services.

The REL is increasing its use of experts, in appropriate content areas, as reviewers and/or collaborative developers of its products and services.

The REL utilizes the input of appropriate advisory groups in the development and implementation of its products and services.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None at this time

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by the Laboratory useful to and used by customers?

The Pacific Educational Conference (PEC), now in its 16th year, represents a major, if not the major activity of the REL. As stated by the REL's CEO, John Kofel, "We consider the PEC

to be the major capacity building activity of PREL.” The PEC appears to represent the best example of how the REL is providing services and products that are useful to and used by customers.

Although initially the PEC was primarily organized and conducted by people outside of the region for the educational community within the region, it has evolved into a conference that is organized, from planning to on-site implementation, by and for persons from the various entities in the Pacific region. The PEC now includes pre-conference workshops which address curricular and administrative issues specifically geared to interests and needs of the various entities in the region.

The PEC has been one of the primary activities that have helped to establish the necessary rapport with clients/customers that has facilitated very open and ongoing communications.

The usefulness, practical applications, and appropriateness of the services and products of the REL are enhanced by the complete involvement and collaboration of the REL with representatives from the area to be served.

1. Strengths

The REL works closely and collaborates with representatives from the entities to help insure that their services and products are useful to and thus, used by clients/customers.

The major driving focus for the REL is in capacity building when providing service or developing products.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None at this time

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

This area of, “focus on customer needs” appears to this reviewer to be a major strength of the REL. Which in turn, seems to be the primary reason for any success the REL has experienced in the region. Historically, to focus on the needs of the educational community within the various entities within the region has not been characteristic of agencies and institutions who have worked in or conducted studies within this region. However, this REL has distinguished itself by consistently focusing on the unique and specific needs of the entities within the region. This, in turn, has resulted in the REL’s now established positive reputation within the region, which is allowing for continued and greater degrees of success.

1. Strengths

The REL is driven by a commitment to focus on the unique and specific needs of the educational communities contained within the various entities of this region.

The REL designs services and products which are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the intended audience.

Products and services are provided in formats that can be used by the intended clients/customers.

2. Areas of needed improvement

The REL needs to be more explicit in identifying their targeted clients/customers.

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the REL's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

Although it can be said that the ultimate targeted population for the REL's services and products are the students of the various entities served by the Lab within the Pacific region, the REL has more recently begun to systematically collect student performance data, including student academic achievement. In their first funding cycle and now into the middle of the second, the focus of the REL has been, appropriately, to work with representatives of the educational community, e.g., DOE representatives, teachers, and administrators, to assist them in identifying targeted needs. The REL now finds itself in the phase of specific product and service development that could be more accurately described as student performance directed. Examples of this would be the PLUS and the Signature 2 (Language and Literacy) programs.

The REL has been in the process of establishing on-site Services Centers on each of the entities and such has been accomplished on all but two of the ten, those being Kosrae and Palau. These Service Centers are seen as an important link between the REL and the educational communities within the entities. They will also allow for greater data collection from appropriate samples of districts, schools, and students.

1. Strengths

The addition of the Service Centers will greatly assist the REL in the collection of student performance data.

2. Areas of needed improvement

The REL needs to consistently collect, analyze, and relate student performance data to the outcomes of its programs, products, and services.

To the extent possible, the REL needs to increase the Lab's focus on issues that may be of national significance in addition to the primary regional focus currently indicative of the Lab's programs.

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

B. To what extent does the Laboratory assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

The REL is assisting the various entities in their attempts to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies. The Lab serves as a primary information resource for the educational communities throughout the region. The REL is only limited in the resources they have to serve such a large geographic region (approximately 4.9 million sq. miles). The REL serves as a major source of access to educational information for the educational community within the region via, telecommunication networks, faxes, as well as distribution of audio and video materials.

Through the REL's leadership development programs, Pacific Internship Program, Leadership Academy, Facilitative Leadership, and Pacific Educator in Residence programs, the REL is providing the opportunity to assist in the development of better qualified administrators who can better serve the educational needs of their entities.

Through their facilitative and collaborative efforts, the REL has been able to assist key educational leaders within the respective entities to identify, prioritize, and target their most important educational needs. This leads to the next phase of assisting in the implementation of strategies to improve education at the local level from implementation to, hopefully, improved student performance.

The results of the RAPSTA study, to date, has assisted in the development of formal policy statements pertaining to teacher and administrator absenteeism in some of the entities.

1. Strengths

The REL works with representatives of the various entities in helping them identify educational needs, and thus, assists them in developing strategies to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies.

Through the PEC, the REL has provided the opportunity to showcase successful school improvement strategies.

The REL has made educationally relevant information more readily available to the educational community within the region.

2. Areas of needed improvement

None at this time

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

At this point in time, it would be appropriate to characterize the REL focus as very specifically regionally focused. Given the history of individuals, agencies, and other institutions working in the educational communities in this Pacific region, it would seem appropriate and fitting that this would be so. However, it is also appropriate that the REL begin to systematically consider the broader implications of the results of its studies and programs for a more “nationally” recognized audience. Many of the findings of the REL’s studies may very well indeed have relevance to other areas on the mainland, such as Alaska and the Southwest, and

other areas that have indigenous populations.

1. Strengths

The REL is beginning to take a leadership role among the other two RELs that have the same specialty area, Language and Cultural Diversity.

The REL's Web site is providing an excellent avenue for national exposure for the Lab.

2. Areas of needed improvement

The REL needs to increase its national visibility by:

Increasing publications in national journals

Increase attendance at national conferences

Increase its collaboration with other institutions studying, developing, and implementing program/products for similar target audiences

Increase the dissemination of products outside the region

3. Recommendations for improvement

None at this time

VI. Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services

This REL can be accurately characterized as having a focus on working with clients/customers to help them identify needs, work to develop programs and products which can address those needs, and build the capacity to make the necessary changes sustainable independent of future Lab involvement. The dedication of the REL's staff from CEO to board members to advisory council members to professional staff, appears to be without equal in meeting their contractual and ideological goals.

To this reviewer, the most important characteristic of those who work in this REL is that

they understand the diversity of cultures that exist through out the region and thus, how to work effectively with members of the educational communities within those cultures to effectively implement comprehensive school improvement strategies.

The REL is currently benefiting from their early efforts to establish the necessary trust and reputation to be effective partners with the educational communities within the Pacific region. The REL's reputation for their knowledge, experiences, and successes within the region appears to be expanding to the mainland and they are at the initial stages of assuming a leadership role in the areas of specialty.

The REL is to be commended for making the kind of progress they have in such a relatively short time. This REL appears to be uniquely positioned to be a major force for improvement of education, in virtually all respects, through out the entities that they serve. It may very well be that the Lab itself does not fully recognize their own level of importance and reputation within the educational communities they serve.

VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas for Improvement, and Strategies for Improvement

The REL's main strength is in its ability to work effectively in the educational communities of the entities it serves. The REL is the major source of educational information for this Pacific region. The REL understands and can work effectively with and in the variety of cultures found in this region. The REL has established the necessary trust and reputation to be effective partners with members of the educational communities they serve. Products, programs, and services are always focused on the needs of the clients/customers. The REL's focus on Literacy is appropriate, given the primary educational needs of the region. The establishment of

Service Centers for each of the entities is an important development that should greatly improve the REL's effectiveness. The REL is staff by knowledgeable, experienced, appropriately trained, and very dedicated professionals who consistently put the needs of the educational communities they serve above their own personal or professional ambitions.

The general areas of improvement should focus around more systematic formalized methods of internal and external evaluation of the REL's products, programs, and services. In addition, the REL should increase its data collection of student performance data as part of product, program, and service development. The Lab should more explicitly define its intended clients/customer base, including the identification of primary, secondary, etc. intended clients/customers and audiences.